

REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE 2024 CUPE BC CONVENTION

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, the BC Region of the National Union has continued to see the benefits of coordination and strategic work under a progressive provincial government. Significant gains were made in several areas, including in organizing new members and at bargaining tables. Key legislative and provincial policy changes were also won, and will benefit CUPE members, non-union workers and broader communities. CUPE National staff worked hard across the year to support CUPE locals and CUPE BC to achieve these gains.

Provincial and local governments continue to invest in public services and the public delivery of these services. This has materially and directly impacted CUPE members and their communities for the better, demonstrating the importance of political action—an importance that cannot be overstated as the fall 2024 provincial election nears. This election will mean so much to the future of our province. For CUPE members this election is the opportunity to elect their employers before heading back to the bargaining table in 2025.

BARGAINING

Faced with rising costs of daily living and persistent unaffordability, CUPE National staff supported members to achieve unprecedented gains in bargaining over the past year. Working together, locals achieved significant monetary gains in the municipal and libraries sectors, along with benefit improvements, and improved access to leaves and work/life balance for members. CUPE locals also made important gains on key issues such as job security, reduced precarity, and improved retirement security. These gains were not achieved lightly; they required significant work by local union leadership, supported by National Union staff, to engage with members and fight for critical priorities.

CUPE National Representatives and Specialists spent hundreds of hours supporting bargaining, both directly as spokespeople at tables, and in the background with strategic bargaining communication plans, enforcing legal rights at the Labour Board, monitoring and analyzing employer tactics and positions, and supporting government relations strategies. National Union staff supported community events and coalition building both internally, within and between CUPE locals and district councils, and externally, with allies in the labour movement and across communities, to build solidarity.



Transportation Labour Disputes - Local 561 and Local 4500

In the first half of 2023, over 200 members providing public transit in the Fraser Valley achieved unprecedented gains following four months on the picket lines. They fought for wage fairness and for a pension so they could retire with dignity. Their leadership was inspiring, as was the hard work and commitment of the dedicated team of CUPE National staff working to support what became the second longest transit strike in the province's history.

National strike resources were mobilized once again in early 2024 to support more than 200 CUPE members at Local 4500 in their fight for wage parity under the Translink umbrella. As a result of their solidarity and commitment, and of the strategy and support of the Region's National Union staff team, CUPE successfully shut down one of the nation's largest bus services for two days, prompting the employer and government decision-makers to take members' demands seriously and find a solution. Because of the Local's steadfast resolve, members achieved historic wage gains, putting them on the path to internal wage equity with their colleagues working for other Translink operating companies.

Looking Forward

With significant bargaining on the horizon in 2025, it is important to reflect on how far work in the BC Region has come, and to consider the lessons learned. There is no one approach to winning at the table. However, recent experience reinforces that CUPE's success hinges on our greatest strength: the membership. Gains at the bargaining table

demonstrate members' resolve to do what's right, and to stand up for all workers. Solidarity and unity, along with a commitment to fighting for fairness, job security, and quality of life for all, make CUPE the strongest union.

POLITICAL ACTION

Bargaining alone cannot solve the affordability crisis, nor some of the other most significant challenges faced by working people. Durable and meaningful solutions to certain issues require a victory at the ballot box. Equally, winning on election day is not the end of the political action process. Advocacy is needed every single day—even with a progressive government—to ensure necessary action is taken on the issues that matter most.

CUPE members continue to struggle to afford basic living costs like food and housing. Wage increases bargained over the past year have gone some, but not all, of the way to keep up with rising costs. Political action must also be part of the solution.

The BC Region has worked closely with CUPE BC over the last year to maximize government engagement. This increased focus on political action and engagement must continue to make progress on critical issues. So too must engagement with members on political action. Success in lobbying to improve childcare, transportation, and housing affordability, all of which leave more money in members' pockets, and work to address the climate crisis and toxic drug supply emergency, ultimately turn on the engagement and activism of members.



New Political Action Coordinator

As part of the BC Region and CUPE BC's increased collaboration around political engagement, a new, dedicated Political Action Coordinator position has been created to support this work. Not only will this new position lead provincial political action, their work will improve capacity through the creation of new and expanded resources and tools, and increase engagement through more training and education for local activists. The new position is assigned to the Strong Communities Working Group, a group of National Union staff dedicated to support the work of CUPE BC in the Region, and expands the number of dedicated staff in the group from four to five, representing a 25 percent increase in staffing support for this unique and critical resource for locals in British Columbia.

2024 BC General Election

With the October 2024 provincial election on the horizon, work has already begun on a comprehensive member-to-member provincial election engagement campaign. The focus of the campaign is to grow activist capacity within the BC Region, not just for the 2024 election, but as part of an expanded culture of political engagement across our union.

The importance of this election cannot be understated. The impact of the significant gains achieved in the last round of provincial bargaining continued to be felt across public sector bargaining at all levels over the past year, with locals in non-provincial sectors achieving historic gains given the monetary landscape. With the 2025 round of bargaining


on the horizon, the negative consequences of a BC United or BC Conservative government will be immediate and costly.

So much more is at stake for CUPE members and for workers in British Columbia than provincial bargaining. Since 2017, the BC NDP government has made substantial and meaningful changes to create a better B.C. for everyone. For British Columbia's working people to build on the successes of the past eight years, CUPE members in communities across the province must be mobilized to re-elect David Eby's BC NDP government, and to hand the BC United and BC Conservative parties a definitive loss this October.

ORGANIZING

The BC Region's organizing team was busier than ever in 2023 as the provincial government's removal of barriers preventing workers from accessing union representation has taken effect. The introduction of single-step certification—or "card check"—has provided thousands of British Columbians greater opportunity to improve their workplaces and their lives through union representation. Growth in CUPE's membership since this legislative change was implemented is a clear indicator of the way in which the previous regressive policy limited worker choice and freedoms.

Following an application in April 2023 to represent more than 3,000 Grad Research Assistants at UBC—a precarious group of student workers whose current pay is below poverty wages—hundreds of additional unorganized workers have been organized into CUPE locals in British Columbia. Library



workers, recreation works, community social service workers and community health workers in communities like Lumby, Richmond, Nanaimo, Vancouver and Castlegar are choosing CUPE.

CONCLUSION

Members and their local leadership are CUPE's greatest strength. Not only do CUPE members go to work every day to provide the services and education our communities rely on, they take on tough fights, challenge injustice, and make life better for working people across the province. Nothing that was achieved in this past year would have been possible without the solidarity and action of the 100,000 CUPE members across the province, and the tireless work of their local executives.

As CUPE National staff working in the BC Region, we are so proud to support CUPE locals and CUPE BC, and the good work that was done over the past year. We look forward to the challenges and opportunities to come in the year ahead.

On behalf of all regional staff, thank you to all members in British Columbia for your support and solidarity, and to CUPE BC's leadership and staff for their steadfast support of National Union work in the BC Region.